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6 March 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Kent

SUBJECT : Soviet Intentions With Regard to Cuba

1. It seems to me that the key factor with regard to our ability to estimate Soviet intentions toward Cuba is whether or not they actually remove all Soviet forces from the island. Because of our present uncertainty with regard to this point, I would like to set down three categories of ideas:

(a) Those ideas that apply whether or not Soviet troops are removed.

(b) Those that pertain if any substantial number of Soviet troops remain.

(c) Those that pertain if all troops are withdrawn.

2. Whether Soviet troops go or stay, there does appear to be some evidence that the Soviets are preparing to turn over some items of equipment to the Cubans previously controlled by the Soviets. These may include the air defense net, the surface-to-air missile system, and the cruise missile system (it is possible that this turnover might be merely a token turnover of some elements in these categories and that the Soviets would retain control of each system as a whole). It would appear logical for the Soviets to turn over substantial items of new equipment to the Cubans to maintain the public posture in Cuba that they are supporting the Cuban government and to mollify Castro to some extent for the trouble that they have given him in the past. For the same reasons, one would expect the Russians to adopt a fairly generous attitude about providing economic aid, military instructors, and replacement military supplies to the Cuban armed forces. This could account for the arms shipments that have come in since November.

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3. If all Soviet troops are removed (except for a relatively small number of instructor personnel who might well stay in any case), I would expect that it would be because the Soviets think the Cuban economy too expensive, are too doubtful of Castro, and too fearful of his power in the island of Cuba to want to leave organized Soviet forces in the islands as a hostage to him. They would probably want to continue to support him for his utility vis-a-vis the United States but would want to avoid an excessive and unproductive economic investment and to be in a position to disclaim responsibility for any future incident that might occur between Cuba and the U. S. In this situation, one would expect Soviet aid to consist primarily of minimum economic aid, with some routine military resupply, and public speeches offering the long range support of Soviet rock ts to a socialist Cuba.

4. If a substantial number of Soviet military personnel remain after the current withdrawals have been completed, one would expect Soviet policy to be substantially what it was when they put the troops in. That is, the troops would represent a Soviet military presence in Cuba which would have its impact in the domestic Cuban situation, in Latin America generally, and on US policy with regard to any possible military action. These troops would in fact constitute a Soviet tripwire in Cuba that US policy-makers would have to reckon with. These troops would be in a position to offer support to the regime or maintain some Soviet leverage in Cuban politics. They would also provide the Soviets with a capability to rebuild their force and introduce new weapons systems more nearly at Soviet option than would be the case if all Soviet troops had been withdrawn and any new venture had to be negotiated from scratch.

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